

Sparks

by Rabbi David Aaron
Founder and Dean, Isralight
Rosh Yeshiva, Orayta

Isn't Humbleness Just Low Self-Esteem?

"Moses was a very humble man, more humble than anyone else on the face of the earth." (Numbers 12:3)

Was Moses, indeed, humble? The man who courageously challenged the mighty Pharaoh the King of Egypt, who led an entire people out of slavery, the man who after seeing the golden calf smashed the very tablets written by the finger of G-d.

Judaism teaches that no character trait is absolutely negative, everything has a role. All we have to do is look at each trait with an open mind and determine its pluses and the minuses. When it comes to pride there is an aspect of it that comes from the godly grandeur of our soul and is therefore, truly humbleness and the source of powerful sacred self esteem. But there is an aspect of pride that comes from our ego which is haughtiness and self destructive; alienating us from our true inner self. This type of pride focuses on petty concerns and social status; it embodies a desire for honor and one-upmanship. This type of pride confuses us to think that as an individual we stand independent and apart from the greater community. However, according to Jewish mysticism our individual soul is really an aspect of the collective soul of the community. An individual is not an isolated being floating in outer space; disconnected from a greater context. Rather an individual is actually an individualistic expression of the national soul of his people. We find personal meaning and fulfillment only to the extent that we daily serve in our own unique way the betterment of our community and ultimately the world.

I think this is one of the common epiphanies for Jews when they visit Israel -- their destined homeland. I recall the first time I toured the borders of Israel and heard heroic stories about young Israel soldiers who valiantly defended their country from invading enemies and sacrificed their lives for the Jewish People. These selfless soldiers gave up their individual life so that their nation could live on. I wondered-- Is there such a reality called national life? Does a nation have a collective soul that encompasses our individual souls?

Jewish mysticism teaches that a nation is not simply the sum total of many individuals. Rather the nation is a whole that is greater than the sum of its parts. In fact, each soul is actually an individual expression of the whole nation born out of the collective soul of the nation. Therefore, even though each of us is an individual we are personally meaningful only because we are members of the national soul; shareholders in its national destiny.

Jewish mysticism also teaches that the national soul is a unique expression of the Universal soul which is G-d. Therefore, an individual soul is also an individualistic expression of the Universal soul—G-d. This is the deeper meaning of the belief that each of us is created in the image of G-d. Each of us is a unique expression and manifestation of G-d. G-d becomes manifest through the unique vantage points of every nation and every individual soul. Therefore there is no such thing as an individual soul that exists separate and independent of its nation's soul and the Universal Soul--G-d.

Self-actualization is generally understood to mean that I actualize myself; I take care of myself, become fully me, use my talents to their utmost and succeed in my evolution towards individuality. My personal

fulfillment does not necessarily have anything to do with anybody else. This definition of self-actualization does not require any national responsibility or commitment to G-d. But in truth there is no such thing as an individual soul existing independent and apart from the collective national soul or the collective universal soul. Therefore, true self-actualization can only be accomplished when it is concerned with facilitating the actualization of my nation's destiny, helping to improve the world and serving to fulfill G-d's purpose.

For example, if I, David Aaron, perceive myself as an independent entity; existing apart and separate of the Jewish people, Humanity and G-d then I am actually alienating myself from my true self. Since my true self is an individual expression of the collective soul of the Jewish People, the world and G-d then when I neglect the needs of my people, the needs of the world and the will of G-d-- I neglect myself. If I really care about myself, then I would really care about my people, humanity and G-d. Therefore, selflessly and powerfully serving your people, the humanity and G-d is the only true way to self actualization. To be selfless is truly selfish and to be selfish is to lose your self.

We need to probe our inner psyche and determine whether the prideful thoughts and feelings we have about ourselves are coming from our ego or from our soul. If they are coming from the ego then they are haughty and self destructive-- alienating us from our true self as it interfaces with our national self, international self and the ultimate self--G-d. But when these prideful feelings come from our soul then they are an expression of true humbleness; powerful assertions of who we are really are. They verify our connection to the collective soul of our people, the world and the universal soul-G-d. These apparently prideful feelings are actually humble confirmation that our spiritual self is an expression of the power and beauty of our people, the world and G-d. A spiritually healthy person intuitively feels that s/he is radiant, powerful, significant and great. If a person does not deeply intuit this then s/he has become disconnected from G-d. Since the soul is an aspect and expression of G-d how can we think of ourselves as anything less than awesome. When people are spiritually healthy they intuit their godly greatness and are driven to do great acts for their community, the world and G-d.

Sometimes people take the wind out of their own sails and undermine the good that they could do by questioning the sincerity of their intentions, thinking 'Hmm, look at me, who do I think I am, how egotistical of me to think this way about myself. To be humble I should step out of the spotlight; I should hide myself in a corner.' Not only is there nothing wrong with confidently acknowledging our talents and strengths, but on the contrary there is something very wrong when we don't acknowledge our talents and strength. If, for example, you have a talent for public speaking, then realize that your 'gift of gab' is a gift from G-d and you have a responsibility to humanity and G-d to use it. If you don't use your G-d given talents then you are an ingrate. In fact, not using your talents is a sign that you actually think they are yours and not G-d's. This attitude is actually a very subtle form of ego and haughtiness.

You need to understand the difference between the ego which separates you from G-d and the truth sense of mission and grandeur which places you in humble service of G-d. G-d may want to reveal His wisdom, creativity, kindness, justice, compassion, peace, beauty through you and improve the world. Your drive and determination may be the grandeur of G-d that is seeking to become manifest in the world through you. So let your soul shine!

Rabbi David Aaron

Author of Endless Light, Seeing G-d, The Secret Life of G-d, Inviting G-d In, Living A Joyous Life, The G-d-Powered Life, and Tefilla Training